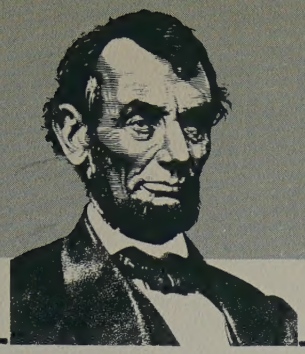

Lincoln Lore

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LINCOLN'S VISIT TO RICHMOND

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton warned President Lincoln at City Point, Virginia, by telegram on April 3, 1865, about exposing his life to rebel assassins. Lincoln thanked him for his caution but replied that, "I have already been to Petersburg, staid with General Grant an hour and a half and returned here. It is certain now that Richmond is in our hands, and I think I will go there tomorrow. I will take care of myself."

And to Richmond he went, on April 4, by gunboat up the James River to a point where the stream was obstructed. Thereupon Lincoln took a small boat or barge rowed by twelve sailors to Rockett's Wharf. Lincoln's arrival was earlier than expected, and General Godfrey Weitzel the Federal officer in control of Richmond, had not provided a proper escort and guard for the president.

Lincoln's party consisted of the twelve sailors, his son Tad, Rear Admiral David D. Porter, a navy captain, and army captain, a signal officer, and the president's personal bodyguard William H. Crook. The sailors were armed with carbines and bayonets, Crook carried a Colt revolver and the military officers had their side arms.

Before Lincoln's boat reached the shore the river bank was crowded with negroes. They had heard, by some kind of underground communication, that Lincoln was on his way to Richmond. They were visably excited and some were singing and shouting. When the presidential party arrived at Rockett's Wharf about 3:00 p.m. they had no idea as to what kind of reception to expect. But by the time Lincoln was ashore hundreds of former slaves met him with outstretched arms. Finally the president was enthusiastically cheered by the negroes and some Federal soldiers that had gathered at the wharf.

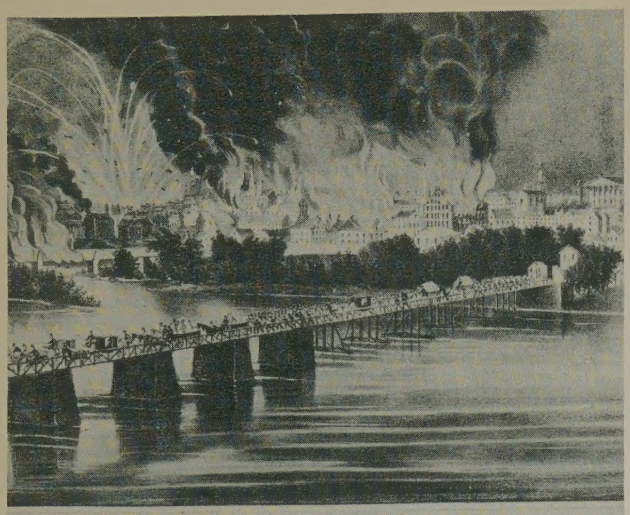
Completely engulfed by the crowd, and in reality at their mercy, the party proceeded afoot up Main Street to the market and up Franklin Street to Governor Street. Fortunately Captain Barnes saw a Federal cavalryman at a street corner and sent him immediately to Weitzel's headquarters with the news of the approaching party.

Lincoln walked rapidly the nearly two miles of dusty streets. He towered above the crowd dressed in a long black overcoat, high silk hat and black trousers presenting a commanding appearance. The escort formed in line. Six sailors were in front and six were in the rear. Mr. Lincoln was in the center and Admiral Porter and Captain Penrose flanked him on the right while Crook, holding Tad by the hand, flanked him on the left. The escort appeared to be guarding a prisoner rather than protecting the head of a state.

As they advanced the streets were teeming with people, white and black. Every window of every building was crowded with heads, and men climbed trees and telegraph poles to get a better view of the president.

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Photograph of an original drawing by Thomas Nast entitled "Lincoln Entering Richmond." The inscription is in the handwriting of Nast.



THE FALL OF RICHMOND, VA. ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 2ND 1865.

Eventually the crowd became silent, almost ominous. After leaving the wharf there was not a sign of welcome, except one young lady who draped an American flag over her shoulders. Crook was apprehensive when he detected a second story window with a blind left partially open and a man dressed in gray pointing something at the president that looked like a gun. The bodyguard quickly released Tad's hand and stepped in front of Lincoln. No shot was fired and Crook wrote later that "it is to the everlasting glory of the South that he was permitted to go and come in peace." Admiral Porter detected more cordiality in the crowds along the sidewalks than did Crook.

They moved up Governor Street to Twelfth Street, and then out Twelfth Street to Marshall Street. Before arriving at the executive mansion of the Confederacy, which was General Weitzel's headquarters, they were met by a cavalry escort which led the way the remainder of the trip. Upon their arrival a large crowd assembled at the mansion, and cheer after cheer was heard as Lincoln entered the colonial pillored two story brick house covered with gray stucco. Three cheers for Admiral Porter were also given.

The fatigued president seated himself in the reception room in Davis' chair and "a brilliant collection" of Union officers assembled in the hall and one by one were presented to the president. The social hour was made more jubilant when one of the Davis' servants found a long black bottle of rare old whiskey. The refreshments were soon consumed by the general and his staff, everyone having a drink except the president. Afterward the citizens generally were allowed the opportunity of shaking the hand of the president of "our whole Union."

After the cordial welcome by General Weitzel and his staff an officer's ambulance was brought to the door. Subsequently the president and official suite (there was no room in the vehicle for Crook), with a cavalry escort of colored troops, made a visit of the captured city. Meanwhile Lincoln had insisted that Crook accompany him and the bodyguard was provided with a saddle horse and he rode on the side of the ambulance where Mr. Lincoln sat.

Lincoln saw the ravages of war in Richmond, and the great fire which the Confederate authorities had accidentally started at the time of the evacuation, was still burning. Again the streets became crowded and it was difficult to move about because so many wanted to get a glimpse of the president. The distinguished visitor was shown the hundreds of burned stores and dwellings, Libby Prison, Castle Thunder and thousands more of homeless people. The only building Lincoln entered while touring the city was the capital. This was a depressing sight as the furniture was completely wrecked, the coverings of the desks ripped to shreds and the chairs were hacked to pieces.

Upon the conclusion of Lincoln's tour the escort took the president back to the wharf, By this time Admiral Porter's flag-ship *Malvern* had been able to make her way past the river obstructions and Lincoln upon first taking a rowboat was placed safely aboard for his return trip to City Point.

Aboard the *Malvern* Lincoln held several conferences the evening of April 4 and the morning of April 5. Eventually the *Malvern* pulled anchor for City Point.

EYE WITNESS DESCRIPTION

(From Admiral Porter's "Anecdotes of the Civil War")

The current was now rushing past us over and among rocks, on one of which we finally stuck.

"Send for Colonel Bailey," said the President; "he will get you out of this."

"No, sir, we don't want Colonel Bailey this time. I can manage it." So I backed out and pointed for the nearest landing.

There was a small house on this landing, and behind it were some twelve negroes digging with spades. The leader of them was an old man sixty years of age. He raised himself to an upright position as we landed, and put his hands up to his eyes. Then he dropped his spade and sprang forward. "Bless de Lord," he said, " dere is de great Messiah! I knowed him soon as I seed him. He's bin in my heart fo' long yeahs, an' he's cum at las' to free his chillun from deir bondage! Glory, Hallelujah!" And he fell upon his knees before the President and kissed his feet. The others followed his example, and in a minute, Mr. Lincoln was surrounded by these people, who had treasured up the recollection of him caught from a photograph, and had looked up to him for four years as the one who was to lead them out of captivity.

It was a touching sight—that aged negro kneeling at the feet of the tall, gaunt-looking man who seemed in himself to be bearing all the grief of the nation, and whose sad face seemed to say, "I suffer for you all, but will do all I can to help you."

Mr. Lincoln looked down on the poor creature at his feet; he was much embarrased at his position. "Don't kneel to me," he said. "That is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy. I am but God's humble instrument; but you may rest assured that as long as I live no one shall put a shackle on your limbs, and you shall have all the rights which God has given to every other free citizen of this Republic."

His face was lit up with a divine look as he uttered these words. Though not a handsome man, and ungainly in his person, yet in his enthusiasm he seemed the personification of manly beauty, and that sad face of his looked down in kindness upon these ignorant blacks with a grace that could not be excelled. He really seemed of another world.

All this scene of brief duration, but, though a simple and humble affair, it impressed me more than anything of the kind I ever witnessed. What a fine picture that would have made—Mr. Lincoln landing from a ship of war's boat, an aged negro on his knees at his feet, and a dozen more trying to reach him to kiss the hem of his garment! In the foreground should be the shackles he had broken when he issued his proclamation giving liberty to the slave.

Twenty years have passed since that event: it is almost too new in history to make a great impression, but the time will come when it will loom up as one of the greatest of man's achievements, and the name of Abraham Lincoln—who of his own will struck the shackles from the limbs of four millions of people— will be honored thousands of years from now as man's name was never honored before.

It was a minute or two before I could get the negroes to rise and leave the President. The scene was to touching I hated to disturb it, yet we could not stay there all dav; we had to move on: so I requested the patriarch to withdraw from about the President with his companions and let us pass on.

"Yes, Massa," said the old man, "but after bein' so many years in de desert widout water, it's mighty pleasant to be lookin' at las' on our spring of life. 'Scuse us, sir: we means no disrespec' to Mass' Lincoln; we means all love and gratitude." And then, joining hands together in a ring, the negroes sang the following hymn with melodious and touching voices only possessed by the negroes of the South:

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Thomas Nast

"Oh, all ye people clap your hands,
And with triumphant voices sing;
No force the mighty power withstands
Of God, the universal King."

The President and all of us listened respectfully while the hymn was being sung. Four minutes at most had passed away since we first landed at a point, where, as far as the eye could reach, the streets were entirely deserted, but now what a different scene appeared as that hymn went forth from the negroes' lips! The streets seemed to be suddenly alive with the colored race. They seemed to spring from the earth. They came, tumbling and shouting, from over the hills and from the waterside, where no one was seen as we had passed.

The crowd immediately became very oppressive. We needed our marines to keep them off.

I ordered twelve of the boat's crew to *fix bayonets* to their rifles and to surround the President, all of which was quickly done; but the crowd poured in so fearfully that I thought we all stood a chance of being crushed to death.

I now realized the imprudence of landing without a large body of marines; and yet this seemed to me, after all the fittest way for Mr. Lincoln to come among the people he had redeemed from bondage.

What an ovation he had, to be sure, from those so-called ignorant beings! They all had their souls in their eyes, and I don't think I ever looked upon a scene where there were so many passionately happy faces.

While some were rushing forward to try and touch the man they had talked of and dreamed of for four long years, others stood off a little way and looked on in awe and wonder. Others turned somersaults, and many yelled for joy. Half of them acted as though demented, and could find no way to testify their delight.

They had been made to believe that they never would gain their liberty, and here they were brought face to face with it when least expected. It was as a beautiful toy unexpectedly given to a child after months of hopeless longing on its part; it was such joy as never kills, but animates the dullest class of humanity.

But we could not stay there all day looking at this happy mass of people; the crowds and their yells were increasing, and in a short time we would be unable to move at all. The negroes, in their ecstasy, could not be made to understand that they were detaining the President; they looked upon him as belonging to them, and that he had come to put the crowning act to the great work he had commenced. They would not feel they were free in reality until they heard it from his own lips.

At length he spoke. He could not move for the mass of people—he had to do something.

"My poor friends." he said, "you are free—free as air. You can cast off the name of slave and trample upon it; it will come to you no more. Liberty is your birthright. God gave it to you as he gave it to others, and it is a sin that you have been deprived of it for so many years. But you must try to deserve this priceless boom. Let the world see that you merit it, and are able to maintain it by your good works. Don't let your joy carry you into excesses. Learn the laws and obey them; obey God's commandments and thank him for giving you liberty, for to him you owe all things. There, now, let me pass on; I have but little time to spare. I want to see the capital, and must return at once to Washington to secure to you that liberty which you seem to prize so highly."

The crowd shouted and screeched as if they would split the firmament, though while the President was speaking you might have heard a pin drop, I don't think any one could do justice to that scene.

An eye witness description may also be found in Charles C. Coffin's book "Four Years of Fighting."

THE PAINTING

Leigh Leslie has described this original oil painting "Lincoln Entering Richmond" by Thomas Nast in a three page folder published in 1865 (Monaghan 645). His description in part of the 5′ x 7′ canvass follows:

Thomas Nast has immortalized this, one of the last great historic scenes in which Lincoln was a central figure, in a painting which he recently finished in his studio at Morristown. "Lincoln Entering Richmond" is unquestionably the best thing that has yet come from the hand of this great painter, Mr. Nast lavished much time and patient care upon this painting and in it he has left an enduring monument to his genius. It is fine in color, superb in drawing, graceful in composition and remarkable for realistic truth, for vigorous individuality, and for strong power of action.

The grouping is simple, yet highly dramatic. Lincoln wears a plain suit of black, and a high silk hat of the style of the period, and his tall form towers above the escort and the rabble surrounding him. His homely lips are tightly closed, and there is in his luminous eye a shade of sadness. His little son, trembling, clings to his left hand. The negroes have broken through the line of marines and are massed about him. Men, women and children, with the light of love and gratitude in their eyes, jostle one another in their eagerness to grasp his hand, or even to touch the hem of his garment. A mother with her babe clinging to her breast is kneeling and kissing his hand; another, smiling and happy, raises her little one above her head that it may see his benevolent face. Men who have grown stooped and tottering, and gray under the lash of cruel masters, become young, and strong, and brave again at sight of him.

This idea Mr. Nast pondered; and it quickly took possession of his mind. He pictured to himself that scene at Richmond; that figure of the century walking through the dusty streets of the proud but fallen capital surrounded by joyous, shouting men, women and children of the race he had liberated. An inspiration came to him. There was poetry, sublimity, immortality in that scene, and his whole soul thrilled as he contemplated it. Mr. Nast took up his brush with enthusiasm. The subject was worthy the best efforts of a Michael Angelo, and the painter worked eagerly, tenderly, reverently. He had known Lincoln intimately, and as vividly as if he had posed for him in his studio did he draw the tall, ungainly figure, and the kindly, care worn, homely face of the Martyr President. One must needs see this splendid creation to appreciate the real flavor of the artist's genius. Mr. Nast has done other excellent paintings of historical association, but none of his earlier works equals this latest one in conception or in finish. As draughtsman, colorist, and master of graceful composition his reputation is by this performance made secure for all coming time.

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